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BUILDING WASH-POT HEATERS

By Pauline Gordon and Elizabeth Williams

Background

Clay, a small county located in the mountains of southwestern North Carolina, is sparsely settled. The 2,600 inhabitants on the 850 farms are honest, hard working, frugal, and intelligent. Many have had the benefit of very few years of formal schooling. The confidence of these people must be slowly earned. They are doubtful and suspicious of newcomers and are slow to take on new ideas and customs.

There is little concern about the lack of transportation facilities; one freight train and two buses a day serve their needs quite adequately. Three general merchandise stores, a drugstore, a post office and a hardware store in the county seat of Hayesville furnish such commodities as are demanded by those who do not get them from their favorite mail-order houses. Seven rural grade schools and the Hayesville High School comprise the educational system for the 1,257 children of school age.

The year-round climate is unusually pleasant and one which should enable the farm folk to carry on a comfortable live-at-home program. Many homes located on eroded hillsides are bare, unpainted, and poorly built. In some sections broom sedge and scrub pines make a feeble attempt to hold the top soil against the ravages of wind and uncontrolled water. Prior to 1941 small crops of tobacco, corn, and wheat were the chief sources of cash income on these subsistence farms.

Into this peaceful county there came in the summer of 1941 about 2,000 TVA workers to build the dam which was to create the Chatuge Reservoir, a storage basin on the Hiawassee River, to help perfect a great flood-control program. The simple life of the people throughout the entire county was upset. Much against their wishes 92 valley farm families had to be adjusted to farms made smaller by the encroaching waters or, even worse, to farms in some other section of the county.

Anxious to give the families all the help possible with their readjustment problems the TVA and the North Carolina Extension Service worked out a plan whereby both educational and material help could be given.

The plan included the employment of a farm agent, an assistant farm agent, a home demonstration agent, and an assistant home demonstration agent.

Problem:

- 1) Poor health of the women was evident throughout the county. Much of this ill health could be directly contributed to back-breaking drudgery. The washing of clothes in Clay County was usually carried on down by the spring or stream.

/1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19 to 22, 1944.

/2 Extension specialists in home management, North Carolina Ext. Serv.

The lack of water-heating facilities increased the drudgery and the length of time required for doing the family wash. Water was usually heated in black iron pots, surrounded by large bonfires. The disadvantages of this practice are:

- a) Supplies a small amount of hot water.
- b) Requires a cartload of wood each wash day.
- c) Creates a hazard.
- d) Causes poor working posture.
- e) Causes unpleasant working conditions. (Smoke inhaled and in eyes.)

2) Many relocated and readjusted families had been jostled out of their apathy by the sudden change in their locations and out of their lifelong habit of thinking that "What was good enough for grandpap is good enough for me;" therefore, it seemed to be a logical time to tackle the problem of improving the practices and methods of one of the household tasks that consumed time, energy, health, and fuel -- supplying hot water on wash day.

3) The majority of the people had never realized the need for improving the method of heating water for wash day. They were simply following the old methods, that had always been used in the county and had no idea that anything could be done about it.

Procedure:

The county had been organized into thirteen watershed areas (a watershed area covers land that is drained by one stream). All farmers of each watershed living under similar circumstances, cooperate in developing and using the same or similar improved farm management and home management practices. In each watershed a committee, composed of three men and one woman, was elected by the farm people. From these watershed committeemen and committee-women, there was elected a county committee of six.

This committee, in cooperation with the county extension workers, planned countywide programs to be carried on in each watershed. The county farm agent and the assistant home demonstration agent work directly with this group.

The home demonstration agent works directly with 15 organized home demonstration clubs. These clubs are organized into a County Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs. The County Council, the governing body of this organization, is composed of the officers and project leaders. This group assisted with planning the program for the monthly meetings of the home demonstration clubs.

The Procedure in Presenting the Solution of this Problem:

- 1) The extension workers had won the respect, confidence, and good will by means of personal contact.
- 2) The county extension personnel worked with the representatives from the two groups - the county watershed committee and the County Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs - in selecting the problem and in finding means of solving it.
- 3) Plans for the solution were worked by county extension workers, State specialists in home management, specialists in agricultural engineering, and representatives from the county organizations.

An over all solution was presented to all sections of the county because this was considered to be a county-wide problem.

The ground work had been laid for this problem 5 months before at community meetings of farm men and women. At that time the need for conveniences on wash day, especially the need for hot water, was discussed.

In presenting the wash-pot heater as a solution for heating water on wash day, four principal means of getting information were employed:

- 1) It was presented by the home demonstration agent and local leaders at home demonstration club meetings.
- 2) It was presented by farm and home extension workers in community meetings in the already organized watershed areas.
- 3) It was presented by local leaders, who received training from the extension workers, in their neighborhood group meetings.
- 4) It was presented by extension workers when making home visits to home demonstration club members and to nonmembers.

In addition to these methods, articles appeared in the local newspaper which was published once a week.

Working drawings for wash-pot heaters were given only to persons requesting them. The names and addresses were kept and a follow-up visit was made by one of the extension workers.

Results:

It is evident that the program has been very effective. Throughout the county there is great interest in improving heating facilities for water. This interest has spread to the improvement of the laundry. Many laundries are being built. These are being equipped with a convenient supply of hot and cold water. In one community 7 families requested working drawings. Unquestionably this will be a continuous program.

By presenting this problem at watershed and home demonstration club meetings very effective results were obtained. For instance, one woman returned from her club meeting and asked her husband to build a wash-pot heater. He said, "Do you have the drawings?" When she said "No," he told her that he had already decided to build one for her because he had heard it discussed at the watershed meeting. He then pulled out the working drawings from his pocket and explained to her how he planned to use native stone in building this labor saver.

After using the wash-pot heater for heating water on hog killing day, the husband of one club woman said to her, "You know, this was the easiest hog killing day we have ever had!" She replied, "Yes, and just think how much work and wood we would have saved if we had built this wash-pot heater when we were first married!"

A 16-year old boy attended a meeting with his grandfather and grandmother. He became greatly interested in making washday easier for his grandmother. Within a week he had built an addition to the well-house for a laundry. After completing the heater for the wash pot, he installed a system for filling and emptying the tubs.

The pride and pleasure of accomplishment when families completed building the wash-pot heater proves its value. Enthusiasm for the "drudgery-saver" is spreading as rapidly as one is completed. It is surprising how easily low-income families can use old brick and stone to build this convenience.

Amazed at the short length of time and the small amount of wood needed to keep a supply of hot water on washday, families ask themselves, "How did we ever get along without it all these years?"